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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001672

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LABOR FOR DOL/ILAB (TFAULKNER)

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: TEACHERS' STRIKE: AN EMERGING DEAL, OR STILL
BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE?

REF: A. KINSHASA 1633

[B](#). KINSHASA 1642

Classified By: Classified by EconOff W.Brafman for reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The GDRC continues difficult negotiations with teachers' unions to try to end the month-long teachers' strike and quell rising tension throughout the DRC, even as private and parochial school leaders call for their students to return to school. The Government continues to face pressures from two sides - the budget and teachers' unions. The GDRC has made what it says is its best and final offer; it is unclear whether teachers' unions will accept it, but government officials are optimistic. Meanwhile, some parents of private school students remain hesitant to send their children to school in light of the continuing threat of violence against them. End summary.

NEGOTIATIONS THUS FAR

[1](#)2. (C) During a meeting with Political Counselor, National Security Advisor Samba Kaputo outlined the negotiations thus far and GDRC's view of the progress. Before the October 1 meeting between teachers' unions and President Kabila, Kaputo and others (including Tresor Kapuku, Vice Minister for Budget) met with school leaders to make a pitch that students have a right to attend school and also to outline plans to begin progressively improving the schools' infrastructure - a desperately needed program - using not only World Bank but DRC funds as well. Kaputo said that the leaders judged this inducement to be sufficient.

[1](#)3. (C) Following this meeting, Kabila and other government officials met with leading union leaders and offered to pay teachers - in the Kinshasa province only - bonuses of USD 45 dollars/month for the next three months, beginning October [1](#)20. There are no promises yet about 2006 payments. The GDRC will pay teachers outside Kinshasa less; the government determines these salaries on a two-tier basis - non-Kinshasa cities, and rural areas. Kaputo emphasized repeatedly that this deal covers only teachers "primes" (bonuses). Government officials state that they are not in a position to give salary increases, because they would then have to raise the salary scale for all other civil servants, and there are insufficient funds to do so. (Note: Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba told Ambassador October 4 that meeting teachers' salary demands of an increase to USD 200 could alone consume ten percent of the GDRC's entire annual budget. End note.) Kaputo said that the IMF has also warned the GDRC of the severe budget impact if it met this demand.

UNIONS' REACTION

[1](#)4. (C) Union leaders insisted on, and received Kabila's personal guarantee, that the GDRC would honor this agreement. The unions also made a new demand, insisting on being party to the development of the 2006 educational budget. Kabila agreed to this, and as a result a union committee will work with the Minister of Higher Education to develop next year's budget - including teachers' salaries.

[1](#)5. (C) Union leaders had assured the President that they would convince their members to accept the deal. Kaputo, with some disgust, said that the union leaders are now running scared, following Monday's "drama" on the locally televised news. After their meeting with Kabila, the unions convened with their members October 3 to get their approval of the government's offer. The meeting did not go well, however, as violence broke out both inside and outside the venue, with several people hurling rocks and chairs. The union leaders subsequently backtracked on their willingness to support the government proposal. Kaputo claims that "other political elements" are paying agitators and highly disgruntled elements of the teachers' unions to cause trouble, because they want an "annee blanche", a year without school - as it could potentially derail elections. (Comment: More likely, Kaputo reflects the PPRD's fear of undermining Kabila's prospects of winning the elections. End comment.) He also said that likely suspects are the same as those who threatened violence leading up to June 30, such as Etienne Tshisikedi's UDPS opposition party and former Minister of

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Mines Diomi Ndongala (himself an aspiring presidential candidate.)

PARENTS WEIGH IN

16. (C) Kaputo and others, including Kabila, also met with parents' organizations and told the parents that it is unrealistic to expect that their contributions to teachers' incomes should suddenly drop to zero. They will have to continue contributions that will decrease progressively. Kaputo said they agreed to this. (Comment: This was probably not a difficult argument to make, as many parents were dubious before the school year started that the government would completely eliminate school fees. End comment.)

GOVERNMENT IS OPTIMISTIC

17. (C) Despite the current difficulties, Kaputo said the Presidency still hopes for a settlement by Friday, October 7. He said that the agreement will have to be on the terms already proposed, as nothing further is possible. Kaputo also told PolCouns that the GDRC had scheduled another meeting with the unions for October 5 at an undisclosed site, with better security controls.

STRIKE SPREADS, VIOLENCE AND FEAR ESCALATING?

18. (SBU) The media reports that teachers in Bukavu, South Kivu, have now gone on strike, partially in response to rocks thrown at teachers, and that teachers are striking in the Western city of Matadi and the Eastern city of Butembo. In Lubumbashi, public and Catholic school students - whose teachers are striking - reportedly attacked students who continued to attend private school. Both the Governor of Kinshasa and private and Catholic school leaders publicly encouraged their students to return to school in Kinshasa October 6, and the Governor of Kinshasa stated that he would assure students' security by providing police protection. EconFSN said that he and some other parents are going to wait until Monday, October 10 to send their children to school. He also said that he saw some children walking to school, but that they were not wearing their uniforms to try to avoid assault.

COMMENT

19. (C) Kabila's personal engagement and the flurry of high level meetings demonstrates the GDRC's concern about the strike. At Kabila's meeting with union leaders, the GDRC even took the unusual step of showing the budget to the unions so that they could understand the very real limitations confronting the government. The government clearly thought it had a deal, but overestimated the difficulty union leaders would encounter in securing their members' agreement. End Comment.
MEECE